



# A Framework for Academic Quality

A Report from the National Consensus Panel on Charter School Academic Quality



**National Alliance for  
Public Charter Schools**



**COLORADO LEAGUE of  
CHARTER SCHOOLS**  
*focus on achievement*

**CREDO**  
[credo.stanford.edu](http://credo.stanford.edu)



**nacsa**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

June 2008

## **Acknowledgements**

The convening partners of the Charter School Quality Consortium express appreciation to all the members of the National Consensus Panel who contributed their time, perspectives, and shared passion for quality education to this initiative. We also thank project advisors Paul Hill and Andy Smarick. This work was conducted as part of a larger three-year project, “Building Charter School Quality: Strengthening Performance Management among Schools, Authorizers, State Charter Support Organizations, and Funders,” made possible by a National Leadership Activities grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter Schools Program.

# Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Framework for Academic Quality: Key Elements	7
Framework for Academic Quality Student Achievement Level (Status)	8
Student Progress over Time (Growth)	10
Postsecondary Readiness and Success	12
Student Engagement	14
General Areas for Further Development	16
Next Steps for the Quality Consortium	16
 <b>Appendices</b>	
Consensus Panel Process Notes	17
Consensus Panel and Staff	18

# Introduction

## Building Charter School Quality: Achieving the Promise

The charter school idea is based on a simple, compelling bargain: greater autonomy in exchange for greater accountability for student achievement. Sixteen years after the nation's first charter school opened in Minnesota, there are 4,300 charter schools serving 1.2 million students in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Yet the quality of these schools across the country varies greatly, ranging from those that rank among the nation's finest schools to some that serve their students poorly and improve little over time. Thus, the powerful potential of the charter movement – to increase quality public school options for all children, particularly for the minority and disadvantaged students “left behind” in traditional school systems – is compromised.

A key challenge that has limited the charter movement's success to date is the broad misalignment in expectations among charter operators, authorizers, funders and other stakeholders about how to measure and judge school quality. Indeed, many believe that the vast diversity in charter school missions, educational models, and student populations -- as well as differences in state accountability requirements and individual authorizer expectations -- makes it impossible to establish common standards and measures of quality that are applicable and meaningful to all kinds of charter schools. The charter sector today has no basic, universal measures of school quality other than those shared with other public schools under the No Child Left Behind Act. It is no wonder that judgments about the performance of charter schools are so frequently ill-informed.

Of course, this weakness in performance evaluation is not confined to charter schools; it afflicts public education as whole, greatly hobbling and constraining efforts to improve schools. Too often, current approaches to evaluating school performance rely on data that are seriously limited and misleading, unhelpful to schools, and inappropriate for high-stakes judgments. To fulfill the promise of the charter school movement and maximize its success and impact, the charter sector nationwide needs to clarify and commit to a common set of basic quality expectations and performance measures to define and assess charter school success. This report responds to this strong need. At the same time, the framework shared in this report can help to advance standards-setting and performance evaluation for all public schools.

## The Charter School Quality Consortium and Consensus Panel

This report is the product of a national consensus process conducted as part of Building Charter School Quality: Strengthening Performance Management among Schools, Authorizers, State Charter Support Organizations, and Funders

(BCSQ), a three-year National Leadership Activities Project funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Charter Schools Program. The following four organizations have collaborated in spearheading this project:

- The Colorado League of Charter Schools
- CREDO at Stanford University
- The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
- The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)

These four organizations are the initial convening partners for the Charter School Quality Consortium, an emerging entity that, when fully developed, will be a force for improving the quality of charter schools nationwide. The consortium's purposes are to:

1. Establish consensus among national leaders and organizations working to bring quality educational options to underserved families regarding academic and operational performance measures and practices that define quality charter schools; and
2. Disseminate information on these necessary measures and practices so they can inform and improve charter school performance nationwide, particularly for schools in need of improvement and in high-need communities -- thereby benefiting students who are most at risk of educational failure.<sup>1</sup>

The Quality Consortium will be an engine for monitoring outcomes from the implementation of these performance measures and practices, providing an empirical base to inform ongoing work to strengthen the charter school sector.

As the first step in developing the national consensus described above, NACSA and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools co-convened the Consensus Panel on Charter School Academic Quality, a national working group consisting of leaders and key stakeholders in the charter school sector -- including charter operators, authorizers, charter school support organizations, policy leaders, researchers, and charter school funders and lenders. The Consensus Panel has launched a grassroots, quality standards-setting initiative to strengthen and advance the charter school sector. This effort will continue and

---

<sup>1</sup>“Building Charter School Quality: Strengthening Performance Management among Schools, Authorizers, State Charter Support Organizations and Funders,” *Proposal to the U.S. Department of Education*, pp. 9-10. In addition to the Quality Consortium, other major national goals of the BCSQ Project are to: 1) create and launch a Performance Management Institute for charter school operators and authorizers; 2) demonstrate and implement Student Growth-to-Standard Performance Measures in four pilot states (Arizona, Colorado, Florida and Ohio); and 3) develop a National Charter School Data Warehouse.

be broadened through the future work of the Charter School Quality Consortium. (The consensus process conducted over the past year is described in Appendix A; Consensus Panel participants are listed in Appendix B.)

The Consensus Panel has focused on three key tasks:

1. Examining and agreeing on a “common core” of academic quality indicators, measures, metrics and benchmark comparisons (defined in this report) that are nationally applicable and useful for all charter schools and authorizers to employ;
2. Ensuring that this core framework supports school-level decisions (internal accountability) while meeting the needs of external stakeholders (external accountability); and
3. Suggesting the best uses of this framework.

The deliberations of the Consensus Panel over the past year have been characterized by intense discussions and spirited, often passionate debates, producing a broad initial consensus on the Framework for Academic Quality set forth in this report. The Quality Consortium convening partners offer this to the charter school community nationwide as a resource – a practical tool and foundation to guide and begin evaluation of school quality, to increase accountability for student learning, and to strengthen performance management among charter schools and authorizers alike.

## An Initial Consensus and Foundation for Future Work

Readers should bear in mind that the following Framework represents simply an initial consensus, intended to serve as a foundation and starting point for assessing academic quality in charter schools across the nation. The consensus represented in this Framework is necessarily broad, in order to apply to – and be meaningful for – every kind of school marching under the highly diverse charter banner.

The Consensus Panel seriously considered and debated a number of measures and metrics that the full Panel ultimately did not agree to include in this initial Framework, for a variety of reasons including shortcomings or barriers in any of the following areas:

- data availability
- data quality
- construct validity
- reliability
- administrative feasibility
- alignment with current accountability mandates
- applicability to the wide diversity of charter schools nationwide
- prohibitive costs of implementation.

At the same time, the Panel agreed that those measures and metrics that were discussed and set aside for now may merit future consideration by the Quality Consortium, as the circumstances that justified the Panel’s decisions may change over time. In addition, as laboratories for educational innovation, charter schools are already demonstrating changes in educational structures and delivery (ranging from various forms of non-classroom-based schooling to changes in the traditional K-12 grade structure) that may require new ways of judging quality and performance. Accordingly, the entire set of measures and metrics considered by the Panel will be archived and forwarded to the Quality Consortium, which will periodically revisit and consider revising the Framework as circumstances merit.

**The performance measures and metrics set forth here are not the only ones that schools and authorizers should consider.** Indeed, there are certainly other measures that thoughtful authorizers and charter schools should consider in developing their own performance contracts or accountability agreements. This Framework is intended to facilitate – not supplant – the work required of schools and authorizers to negotiate and establish a variety of performance measures, metrics and targets that are meaningful for each school’s mission and design, and aligned with federal, state and authorizer expectations. The Consensus Panel recommends the current Framework as an essential foundation on which to build – while acknowledging that, in the spirit of continuous improvement, the Framework itself is subject to ongoing development and refinement through the forthcoming work of the Quality Consortium.

We acknowledge that this is not the first or only effort in this arena. Since the advent of charter schools, charter authorizers across the country have established performance measures and accountability systems for the schools they oversee – though authorizer practices and oversight systems are as wide-ranging in quality as charter schools themselves. Major national charter school funders such as the Walton Family Foundation, New Schools Venture Fund, and Charter School Growth Fund have advanced the pursuit of quality-measurement systems for charter schools. On the research front, the National Charter School Research Project’s Charter School Achievement Consensus Panel has focused on finding appropriate growth measures and techniques to enhance school research, as well as offering a model for creating consensus around their work.

The Charter School Quality Consortium builds upon these efforts, advancing the charter school sector by building capacity for performance management and by aligning performance incentives for schools to strengthen learning outcomes for all students. Specifically, we hope to:

- Build knowledge about sound performance measures and associated practices among leaders and key stakeholders in the charter school movement nationwide.
- Strengthen school performance management practices to support school quality and both internal and external accountability.
- Improve charter school authorizing and oversight, particularly by improving the performance measures that form the basis for high-stakes decisions about school quality.
- Build the capacity of charter school support organizations to understand and report on school performance and help schools to improve.
- Support charter school funder and lender portfolio management by providing a common, nationally applicable framework for assessing school performance.
- Enlighten and improve state and federal policy concerning school quality judgments.
- Enable schools to better identify the needs of various types of students (e.g., Special Education, Free/Reduced-Price Lunch, English Language Learners) and individual learners through disaggregated data analysis, thereby helping to close achievement gaps and meet the needs of all students.

## How to Use the Framework

This Framework for Academic Quality is built around four essential indicators of academic quality and associated measures, metrics, and benchmark comparisons. It is intended as a practical tool to spur and guide improvement throughout the charter sector, regardless of a given school's particular mission or student population. Key groups within the charter community can use the Framework in the following ways:

- **SCHOOL OPERATORS** to help guide school accountability planning and ongoing performance management, and to demonstrate academic performance to external parties.
- **CHARTER AUTHORIZERS, FUNDERS AND LENDERS** to provide a common core of quality indicators, measures, metrics and benchmarks to guide evaluation of all the charter schools in their portfolio.
- **CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS** to illuminate areas of strength and areas for improvement across all the charter schools they support.

To use the Framework appropriately, readers should note the following:

**USE THE ENTIRE FRAMEWORK.** This Framework outlines a core body of evidence that charter schools, authorizers and other stakeholders should seek as a foundation for school evaluation. Parties using this Framework for school evaluation and particularly for high-stakes judgments should use it in its entirety (subject to obvious grade-level limitations for certain elements), not selectively. It would not be appropriate to use only some measures in the Framework while ignoring others applicable to the same grade levels. Likewise, no single source of data or benchmark comparison in this Framework should be the sole basis for high-stakes judgments concerning a school.

**DISAGGREGATE DATA THOROUGHLY.** All data collected and analyzed pursuant to this Framework should be disaggregated to the greatest extent possible (by grade, class, and student groups and subgroups) to clarify student achievement and needs.

# Framework for Academic Quality:

## Key Elements

Key elements of this Framework for Academic Quality include (from the most general to the most specific):

### Indicators > Measures > Metrics > Targets

In addition, Benchmark comparisons are a fifth essential element of this framework. Benchmark comparisons can be employed for both Metrics and Targets.

Following is an overview of these elements and key terms as used in the Framework:

**INDICATORS.** Indicators represent general dimensions of academic quality or achievement, such as “Postsecondary Readiness and Success,” that the Consensus Panel has identified as essential. The four key academic quality indicators set forth in this Framework are accompanied by measures, metrics and benchmarks that the Consensus Panel recommends for widespread adoption and use by charter schools and authorizers.

**MEASURES.** Measures are general instruments or means to assess performance in each area defined by an indicator. Measures require the application of specific metrics or calculation methods (see below). For example, a measure of postsecondary readiness is high school completion.

**METRICS.** Metrics specify a quantification, calculation method or formula for a given measure. For example, the typical high school completion metric is a graduation rate, such as “the percentage of ninth-graders graduating in four years.”

**TARGETS.** Taking metrics a step further, targets are specific, quantifiable objectives that set expectations or define what will constitute success on particular measures within a certain period of time. For example, a graduation-rate target might be “90% of ninth-graders graduating within four years.” Likewise, state-mandated performance levels are common targets. Having well-conceived and well-defined performance targets is important to achieve and evaluate school success. *However, targets should be set by schools, authorizers, and state and federal policy – so the Framework set forth below does not specify targets for each recommended measure and metric.*

<sup>2</sup> CREDO at Stanford University, one of the Quality Consortium convening partners, will serve as a resource for schools and authorizers seeking appropriate benchmark comparisons. Using national and state-by-state school performance data collected for CREDO’s national school performance database, CREDO has the capacity to identify appropriate national and state benchmarks (as defined herein) for charter schools, and will produce examples for the four states that are partners in the BCSQ grant.

<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this Framework, individual academic histories reflect the students’ baseline achievement or academic starting points upon enrolling in the school.

**BENCHMARK COMPARISONS.** Benchmarks compare the performance of an organization to that of exemplars in its field or industry. The benchmark comparisons recommended in this Framework identify two types of meaningful comparison groups for any charter school, based on obtainable data: <sup>2</sup>

1. The best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation – defined as those demonstrating the highest sustained achievement and/or the highest sustained student growth, without adjusting for student race or socioeconomic status; and
2. The best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation – defined as those demonstrating the highest sustained achievement and/or the highest sustained student growth among schools with equivalent individual student academic histories, without adjusting for race or socioeconomic status.<sup>3</sup>

Charter schools, authorizers and other parties using this Framework for school evaluation should consistently apply both of these benchmark comparisons for all applicable measures to obtain broad and clear perspective on a school’s performance.

## Indicators

The Consensus Panel recommends four essential indicators of academic quality:

1. **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL (STATUS)** – This indicator shows how students have performed at a single point in time on particular assessments (typically including, but not necessarily limited to state standardized tests). In other words, it is a “snapshot” of student performance at that point in time.
2. **STUDENT PROGRESS OVER TIME (GROWTH)** – This indicator examines how individual students have improved over time on particular assessments.
3. **POSTSECONDARY READINESS AND SUCCESS (FOR HIGH SCHOOLS)** – This indicator focuses on student preparation for postsecondary education, training, workforce participation or military service.
4. **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT** – This indicator focuses on basic, objective measures of student engagement in schooling, such as attendance and continuous enrollment.

The following pages set forth the Framework for Academic Quality, built around four essential indicators and associated measures, metrics, and benchmark comparisons.

## Indicator #1: Student Achievement Level (Status)

Measures	Metrics	Benchmark Comparisons
<b>Proficiency Levels on State Assessments by Grade and Subject</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students scoring at proficiency</li> <li>• Percentage of students scoring at each state performance level (e.g., Advanced, Proficient, Below Proficient)</li> <li>• Attainment of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>College Entrance Exam (e.g., ACT or SAT) Composite and Subtest Scores</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students reaching score predictive of college success on exam (as determined by the test publisher)</li> <li>• Median score</li> <li>• Percentage of students taking college entrance exam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>High School Exit Exam (if applicable)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students passing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>

## Notes:

- 1. TESTING CYCLES.** While acknowledging that state accountability systems are generally based on Spring-to-Spring or Fall-to-Fall test results, the Consensus Panel recommends Fall-to-Spring testing (as a complement to the state testing schedule, if necessary) in order to assess each school's impact on student learning during the academic year, as well as to avoid the effects of "summer loss."
- 2. INCENTIVES CREATED BY STATUS MEASURES.** The Consensus Panel discussed concerns about metrics that focus simply on proficiency attainment, such as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as currently deployed. The chief concern is that when such metrics are the sole focus of high-stakes school accountability, they may create incentives and pressure for schools to concentrate attention and resources on students who are "on the cusp" of proficiency or the next-closest performance level, while diminishing incentives to meet the needs of students who are furthest behind as well as those who are already proficient. The use of measures that assess student growth over time, as discussed in the next section of this Framework, partially remedies this problem.
- 3. VARIATION IN STATE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS.** The Consensus Panel acknowledges serious concerns about wide variation across the states in setting proficiency standards for student learning, which makes it difficult to judge school or student achievement across state lines. This Framework therefore includes numerous metrics that are independent of state proficiency standards. In addition, the Panel expressed interest in using the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) to benchmark school performance on state assessments.
- 4. SUBJECTS TESTED.** State assessment programs generally exclude some subjects from annual testing (commonly testing only Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics), thereby providing a limited perspective on student learning. Schools and authorizers may wish to use national or other valid, reliable assessments in order to assess student learning in subjects not covered by state assessments.
- 5. EXIT STANDARDS, END-OF-COURSE ASSESSMENTS, AND GATEWAY EXAMS.** The Consensus Panel discussed the pervasive problem of students being passed along through every stage of K-12 schooling without meaningful promotion or graduation standards, ultimately graduating from high school without knowledge and skills necessary for higher education or for joining the workforce. The Panel encourages the use of promotion and exit standards, end-of-course assessments, and/or gateway exams, while recognizing these as decisions for states, districts, or individual schools.

## Indicator #2: Student Progress over Time (Growth)

Measures	Metrics	Benchmark Comparisons
<b>Annual Gains for Same (Matched) Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students achieving or exceeding targeted gains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>Longitudinal Growth Based on Similar Starting Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typical or average growth rate</li> <li>• Percentage of students achieving or exceeding typical or average growth rate</li> <li>• Percentage of students making or exceeding target growth rate</li> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>Criterion-Referenced Longitudinal Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students making adequate growth to reach or maintain proficiency during a certain period of time</li> <li>• Percentage of students already proficient or advanced who maintain or improve their performance level</li> <li>• Percentage of students moving to a higher performance level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>

## Notes:

### 1. NEED FOR QUALITY STUDENT-LEVEL LONGITUDINAL

**DATA.** Rigorous analysis of student-level longitudinal data is imperative to reveal and assess individual student academic needs and growth over time. This kind of data examination is critical for schools to diagnose and meet every student's learning needs; for effective strategic decisionmaking for external accountability; and for well-informed evaluation of school performance. Charter schools and authorizers that currently are not collecting, analyzing and reporting student-level longitudinal data should make this a top priority for improving their assessment systems.

### 2. DIFFERENCES IN METHODOLOGIES.

To select and implement assessment systems that will produce quality longitudinal data, it is important for schools and authorizers to have a basic understanding of common methods of growth analysis and their respective advantages, limitations and appropriate (or inappropriate) uses.

- “Gain-score analysis” is the simplest way to measure growth, using a simple subtraction method. That is, one year's score is subtracted from the prior year's score, with the difference referred to as the “gain score.” While simple to understand and replicate, this measure requires a cross-grade achievement scale (i.e., a vertical scale) and is often contaminated by floor and ceiling effects of the particular assessment, making it difficult to infer students' “pure learning” and thus presenting serious problems if used in high-stakes decisions.
- In contrast, value-added analysis or modeling (VAM) is a refined longitudinal growth analysis technique that uses deviations from expected growth of students as a basis for inferring school, teacher, or program effectiveness. VAMs are most appropriate when assessing effectiveness across a large number of schools.

### 3. OPTIONS FOR ANALYZING STUDENT GROWTH.

Not all state education agencies conduct longitudinal growth analyses. To understand individual student progress in states that do not provide growth analysis, charter schools, authorizers and/or charter support organizations can obtain and analyze state assessment data themselves; or charter schools can administer national assessments that readily provide student growth data and analysis.

### 4. GRADE LEVELS TESTED ANNUALLY.

Most state assessment programs do not test high school students annually. To understand student academic growth in grade levels not annually tested by the state assessment, schools should consider administering national assessments that readily provide student growth data and analysis.

### 5. SUBJECTS TESTED.

State assessment programs generally exclude some subjects from annual testing (commonly limiting testing to Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics). Schools and authorizers may wish to use national or other valid, reliable assessments to assess student academic growth in subjects not covered by state assessments.

## Indicator #3: Postsecondary Readiness and Success (for High Schools)

Measures	Metrics	Benchmark Comparisons
<b>Postsecondary Access &amp; Opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students enrolled in a college-prep curriculum (based on state high school standards or admission standards for in-state public 4-year colleges)</li> <li>• Percentage of graduates submitting applications to postsecondary institutions, by type of program (4-year and 2-year colleges, trade and apprentice programs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>High School Completion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation rate calculated as recommended by the National Governors Association<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>Postsecondary Admission</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students gaining admission to postsecondary institutions (4-year and 2-year colleges, trade and apprentice programs)</li> <li>• Percentage of students submitting a complete Federal Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA)</li> <li>• Percentage of Free/Reduced-Price Lunch students admitted to postsecondary institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>Postsecondary Enrollment or Employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of graduates, by cohort, enrolled in postsecondary institutions (college, trade and apprentice programs) by February of Year 1 after graduating from high school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>

## Indicator #3: (continued)

Measures	Metrics	Benchmark Comparisons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students submitting a complete Federal Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA)</li> <li>• Percentage of Free/Reduced-Price Lunch students admitted to postsecondary institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>

### Notes:

**1. DEFINING “POSTSECONDARY READINESS.”** The Consensus Panel debated how to define postsecondary readiness, given the diversity of postsecondary paths that students may take – including college, the workforce, military service, and trade schools – as well as the fact that a great number of charter schools cater to students who are at high risk of dropping out of high school. For purposes of this Framework, the Panel agreed that an appropriate definition of postsecondary readiness would be “readiness to earn a competitive wage and preparation for economic self-sufficiency” – a broad definition to urge data collection and reporting on all postsecondary paths that students may take.

**2. RIGOR OF COLLEGE PREP CURRICULA.** The Consensus Panel expressed concern about high variation in the (largely self-reported) rigor of college prep courses offered by high schools. While not reaching agreement at this time on a national measure for college prep curricular rigor, the Panel has identified this as a priority task for the next phase of the Quality Consortium’s work.

**3. SHARING OF DATA.** To enable charter schools to track students more easily after graduation, the Consensus Panel recommends that organizations that collect postsecondary enrollment data (i.e., postsecondary institutions, state education departments and other agencies) share such data with secondary schools.

Likewise, the Panel recommends that federal and state agencies that collect employment and military service data share such data with secondary schools.

**4. QUALITATIVE MEASURES.** The Consensus Panel discussed the use of qualitative measures for postsecondary readiness, including surveys or other instruments to assess factors such as student motivation or life skills. The Panel did not agree to include such measures in the present Framework, because the measures discussed were either not outcomes-focused or currently not comparable across all schools. While no consensus was achieved about qualitative outcome metrics or any single instrument to be used for these areas of interest, the Panel urges schools to explore and adopt rigorous qualitative measures to further illuminate and demonstrate their students’ postsecondary preparedness, if desired. The Panel believes that there are a variety of surveys and instruments that serve this purpose.

<sup>4</sup>The NGA graduation rate formula divides the number of graduates in a particular year by the number of students entering the ninth grade for the first time four years before, plus the difference between the number of students who transfer in and out over the same four years. That is:  $[On-time graduates in Year X] / [(first-time entering ninth-graders in Year X - 4) + (transfers in - transfers out over the 4-year period)]$ . *Graduation Counts: A Compact on State High School Graduation Data*, National Governors Association, 2005.

## Indicator #4: Student Engagement

Measures	Metrics	Benchmark Comparisons
<b>Student Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average Daily Attendance rate</li> <li>• Percentage of students attending a target percentage of days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction and state</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction and state</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous Enrollment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students continuously enrolled throughout the year</li> <li>• Percentage of students re-enrolled from one year to the next</li> <li>• Percentage of students continuously enrolled for multiple years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction, state, and nation</li> </ul>
<b>Truancy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of students exceeding a particular number of truancies in a given period of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best-performing nonselective public schools in the chartering jurisdiction and state</li> <li>• Best-performing comparable schools in the chartering jurisdiction and state</li> </ul>

## Notes:

**1. SHOULD “STUDENT ENGAGEMENT” BE AN INDICATOR?**

While student engagement is not a traditional academic outcome like the other indicators above, the Consensus Panel identified it as an “interim outcome” – a precondition essential for achieving other educational outcomes, and thus meriting attention in this Framework.

**2. OTHER MEASURES POSSIBLE AT SCHOOL LEVEL.**

The Panel engaged in a spirited discussion over how to measure student engagement. Student engagement is often demonstrated by affective qualities – e.g., student motivation, attitudes or psychosocial development – that are not readily or reliably measured or universally applicable to the diverse charter schools across the country. In addition, some measures relevant to student engagement may create incentives to under-report data (e.g., student violence or suspensions) if used to inform high-stakes judgments of school quality. The Consensus Panel discussed a number of possible measures for student engagement including climate surveys and qualitative instruments, and the Panel recognizes that such measures, which may capture student engagement more completely, can be valuable for individual schools. For the purposes of this Framework, however, the Panel selected the above limited set of easily quantifiable measures that can reflect student engagement at a basic, objective level across the wide diversity of charter schools nationwide.

**3. CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT.** A common measure related to student engagement is student attrition, which may be due to a number of factors including choosing another school, moving away, dropping out, or expulsion. Continuous enrollment – the percentage of students who stay enrolled in a school over time – is the inverse of student attrition, and the metrics above capture continuous enrollment over various periods of time, from one year to multiple years. The Panel agreed that as a measure of student engagement, continuous enrollment would be more broadly informative than attrition – capturing the percentage of students who stay in the school over time while simultaneously reflecting the percentage who leave for various reasons.

**4. STATE-SPECIFIC DEFINITIONS AND FORMULAS.** The Panel recognizes that states vary in how they define or approach the above measures. For example, formulas for calculating ADA vary from state to state, and some states have different definitions for ADA for homebound and pre-school students. Thus, the definitions and formulas used by charter schools and authorizers will depend on their state.

# General Areas for Further Development

The Consensus Panel identified two general areas for further development as the Quality Consortium continues its work:

**1. MORE MEASURES FOR K-8 SUCCESS.** Several of the measures in this Framework focus on the ultimate results of K-12 public education that occur at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The Consensus Panel recognizes the need to develop additional valid measures of success for K-8 schools, particularly given that the majority of charter schools serve grades K-8.

**2. NON-TRADITIONAL AND MISSION-SPECIFIC MEASURES.** The Consensus Panel recognizes that standardized tests and other readily quantifiable measures (e.g., attendance rates) do not completely capture all dimensions of school performance and quality that may be vital to a school and its stakeholders. The Panel discussed and recognized the importance (for some schools more than others, depending on each school's mission and design) of establishing valid, reliable measures of academic quality beyond standardized tests and traditional measures.

Non-traditional performance measures are often necessary to assess and demonstrate a school's achievement of its unique mission and educational promises. These might pertain, for example, to the arts, technology, entrepreneurship or environmental education; or to character development, service learning, leadership skills, or foreign-language proficiency.

In light of the wide diversity of charter school missions and designs across the country, as well as the technical challenges of establishing validity and reliability for non-traditional performance measures, the Consensus Panel did not reach agreement on the role and usage of such measures for purposes of this Framework. The Panel agreed that non-traditional measures can be valuable if well-developed, and that schools and authorizers should work to develop and use valid, reliable measures and metrics for dimensions of school achievement not captured by standardized tests or other traditional means. In addition, the Panel flagged this topic for further attention and development in the continuing work of the Quality Consortium.

# Next Steps for the Quality Consortium

Key next steps for the Quality Consortium include:

- 1. IMPLEMENTATION:** The Quality Consortium seeks to have charter school operators, authorizers and funders nationwide adopt and employ the indicators, measures, metrics, and benchmark comparisons set forth in the above Framework for Academic Quality to refine and enhance their performance management practices. The Quality Consortium will emphasize longitudinal growth measures and benchmarking in Building Charter School Quality Project pilot states (Arizona, Colorado, Florida and Ohio).
- 2. ONGOING DISCUSSION VIA WEBSITE:** As an extension to convened meetings and development of the measures and metrics, the Quality Consortium now hosts a website ([www.bcsq.org](http://www.bcsq.org)) as a forum for leaders and stakeholders in the charter movement to discuss and respond to the Consensus Panel's draft documents. This forum will further the refinement of the proposed measures, metrics and benchmarks as well as encourage stakeholder learning.
- 3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE:** To complement the work of the Consensus Panel, the Quality Consortium will launch the Performance Management Institute in 2008, incorporating the above Framework for Academic Quality into the Institute curriculum.
- 4. DEVELOP FRAMEWORK FOR OPERATIONS AND GOVERNANCE QUALITY:** By the end of 2008, a second Consensus Panel will reach consensus on a framework for evaluating the quality of charter school operations and governance. This second set of indicators, measures, metrics and benchmarks will complement the Framework for Academic Quality and is likewise intended for broad adoption by the charter school sector.

# Consensus Panel Process Notes

## Role & Charge of the Panel

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools co-convened a national working group representing key stakeholders in the charter school movement – including charter operators, authorizers, state associations, policy leaders, researchers, lenders and funders. The charge of this working group – the Consensus Panel on Charter School Academic Quality – was to establish consensus regarding a core set of academic performance measures that define quality charter schools, and to disseminate information on these necessary measures so they can inform and improve charter school performance nationwide.

The expected results of this consensus process included:

- Consistency across like organizations in the charter school sector
- A solid basis for policy discussions
- Clear expectations for measurement
- Knowledge transfer and capacity-building among all types of organizations

## The Consensus Process

On June 6-7, 2007, the Consensus Panel met for the first time in Snowbird, Utah to begin forging a consensus on a core set of academic indicators, measures and metrics that define quality charter schools. In this first meeting, the Panel determined a set of key indicators and established a draft set of measures and metrics. Over the summer, smaller work groups (indicator committees) continued to refine the measures and metrics for each indicator.

On September 17 -18, 2007, the Consensus Panel met again at Stanford University. At this meeting, indicator committees offered final drafts of measures and metrics for the full Panel's consideration and discussion. The decisions and discussions resulting from this meeting were summarized in the first draft Consensus Compact Working Document, released for review and comment to the Consensus Panel and selected other leaders in the national charter school community in early November 2007.

Since then, the Building Charter School Quality Project team has solicited, reviewed and extensively discussed comments from numerous Panel participants and has worked to incorporate practical suggestions into the second draft Consensus Report, released for comment at the end of February 2008.

## Decision Rules of the Consensus Panel

The charge to the Panel was to achieve consensus on the indicators, measures, and metrics contained in the above Framework. If consensus was not reached on particular points, Panel participants then identified areas of disagreement, opposing arguments, and any necessary conditions for future consensus. Key areas of non-consensus are noted at the end of the section for the relevant indicator in the above Framework.

## APPENDIX B.

# Consensus Panel & Staff

## Consensus Panel

Christopher Barbic, YES Prep Public Schools

John Chubb, Edison Schools

Stephen Hinson, Charter School Growth Fund

Dean Kern, U.S. Department of Education

Robin Lake, Center on Reinventing Public Education

Erin Lanoue, Chicago Charter School Foundation

Rene Lewis, Florida Consortium of Charter Schools

Trinita Logue, IFF

Cathy Lund, Walton Family Foundation

Bruno Manno, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Isis Randolph-McCree, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Ron Miller, SUNY Charter Schools Institute

Lynn Norman-Teck, Florida Consortium of Charter Schools

Mukta Pandit, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

Jim Peyser, NewSchools Venture Fund

Lory Pilchik, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

Mike Ronan, Lighthouse Academies

Sheree Speakman, Walton Family Foundation

Ting Sun, Natomas Charter School

Leslie Talbot, Talbot Consulting

Dee Thomas, Minnesota New Country School

Mark Weinberg, The Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University

Bill Wildman, RBC Capital

## Convening Partners and Project Staff

### Colorado League of Charter Schools

Jim Griffin, President  
Richard Wenning, Vice President for Quality and Accountability  
Jody Ernst, Director of Research and Evaluation

### CREDO at Stanford University

Macke Raymond, Director  
Ken Surratt, Assistant Director  
Meg Cotter-Mazzola, Manager of Federal Projects

### National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Nelson Smith, President  
Margaret Lin, Of Counsel & Senior Editor  
Joey Gustafson, Consultant

### National Association of Charter School Authorizers

Greg Richmond, President & CEO  
Susan Miller Barker, Vice President for Research and Evaluation  
Elizabeth Genco, Program Support Manager





# **Building Charter School Quality**

**[www.bcsq.org](http://www.bcsq.org)**

---

**National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**  
[www.publiccharters.org](http://www.publiccharters.org)

**Colorado League of Charter Schools**  
[www.coloradoleague.org](http://www.coloradoleague.org)

**National Association of Charter School Authorizers**  
[www.qualitycharters.org](http://www.qualitycharters.org)

**Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO)**  
[credo.stanford.edu](http://credo.stanford.edu)